

Summary Notes
2002 Regional Forum on WIA Reauthorization
Dallas, TX

April 30, 2002

The U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration scheduled a series of public forums in March - May 2002 to hear comments on issues related to the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The Region IV, Dallas, forum was held on April 30, 2002 at the Hilton Park Cities Hotel in Dallas, Texas. A total of 78 participants attended and 15 participants made comments. Also in attendance were representatives from ETA's Regional and National Office and staff from Technical Assistance and Training Corporation.

The session was introduced as follows:

- **Welcome and Introductions**
Joseph C. Juarez, Regional Administrator
Employment and Training Administration

Betty Simmons, Deputy Region HUB Director,
Department of Health and Human Services
- **Overview of Reauthorization Issues and Process**
Raymond Uhalde, Deputy Assistant Secretary
Employment and Training Administration
- **Explanation of Public Comment Process**
Ed Trumbull, TATC Facilitator

Ed Trumbull moderated the public comment session that followed. Pre-registered speakers were invited to present their comments first.

15 speakers presented oral comments, some of whom submitted written comments to supplement their presentations. The summary below only considers the oral comments recorded during the forum. Written testimony submitted by presenters will be summarized in the final report to be submitted at a later date.

The comments are categorized according to the topics in the *Discussion Guide: WIA Reauthorization Issues*, followed by additional topics addressed, as follows:

- I. Business Engagement
- II. Governance/State Flexibility
- III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs
- IV. One-Stop Career Centers
- V. Unemployment Insurance/Employment Service Reform and the One-Stop System
- VI. Improved Opportunities for Training
- VII. Other Comments

I. Business Engagement

No comments were made specifically on this topic.

II. Governance/State Flexibility

Flexibility and Concerns Regarding Funding

- Texas One-Stop Centers are extraordinarily successful in providing universal access. Yet the current level of funding is not enough. *State Government Agency Representative*
- Allow Local Boards greater flexibility in managing all resources in the regions. Streamline funding and allow Local Boards to direct resources to create programs specific to local needs. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

Comments Regarding Workforce Investment Boards' Role and Membership

- Workforce Investment Boards should have resources reserved to provide services for the hard-to-serve populations. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- Modify Board memberships to reduce the amount of participation of partners who represent conflicts of interest. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

Maintaining Employer Engagement in the System

- The system must do a better job of meeting the needs of employers. In 1995 Texas implemented workforce and welfare reform jointly. The system has over 96 full-service One-Stop Centers and over 150 additional One-Stops and satellites. The system placed over 84,000 TANF recipients last year who reported earning over \$7.20 in average hourly earnings. Despite this success, however, the employers are missing from the system. *State Government Agency Representative*
- WIA has provided the private sector with a strong leadership role within the workforce system. It is important to maintain the interest of the private sector. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- Most businesses do not understand that WIA is about economic development. It is tough to get business to become involved in an initiative if they do not understand the laws and acronyms. The system needs to provide the business community a chance to understand that the development of the system will take some time, but the end result is worth their effort. They understand where the WIA is supposed to be going. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*

- The WIA system works because it is employer driven and locally administered. In Texas, business is the primary customer. Both Boards and One-Stop operators utilize consultants to engage employers at the local and regional level. They learn about local market trends, determine what jobs openings will develop, and plan outplacement services. They provide information on WIA opportunities, including on-the-job and customized training programs. 75 percent of employers surveyed report that they are consistently satisfied with the level of services received. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

General Comments Regarding the Workforce System

- The Texas workforce system has only partially fulfilled its promise. While Local WIBs take their responsibilities seriously, many WIBs do not follow system rules and policies. As a result the system fails to meet the needs of those individuals who require the most employment assistance. *Non-Profit Organization Representative*
- Federal and state requirements are frustrating. There should be greater integration within the system, including the implementation of common funding cycles and common definitions. It is a waste of time and money to require Boards to account for the money spent in the way they must currently do so. *State Government Agency Representative*

III. Linking WIA with TANF and other Partner Programs

Partnership

- Many partners have been negatively impacted by the change from JTPA to WIA. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- The integration of TANF into One-Stops is not complete. The TANF customer is served in the same manner as the WIA customer. However, the range of allowable services varies greatly between the groups. This should not be the case. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

Job Retention and Advancement

- A greater focus is needed on post-employment services. It is critically important for all workers to forge an attachment to the workplace in order to achieve long-term success. The single most important service that will enable long-term employment is the availability of childcare. This service directly impacts an employer's bottom line, particularly if the employer is experiencing high turnover rates or high absenteeism due to difficulties with childcare. *State Government Agency Representative*

TANF Reauthorization

- TANF and WIA reauthorization should focus on outcomes, not process. The primary challenge is to coordinate the programs using more compatible program definitions and requirements. There is a major disconnect with how TANF is measured and how other programs, including WIA, are measured. These differences further segregate TANF clients. TANF measures need to change to focus on wage advancement. *Non-Profit Organization Representative*
- Employers are frustrated by the TANF process measures. Caseworkers that assist TANF clients must track their every move. If their customer performs poorly, it reflects badly on the caseworker's record. *Non-Profit Organization Representative*

IV. One-Stop Career Centers

- The Workforce Orientation Method provides One-Stop users with an orientation to help them learn more about the Center's available services. Some people use the resources to find their own jobs. *State Government Agency Representative*
- One-Stop management has not been a level playing field. Many One-Stops are large, for-profit entities. They have the newest technology, but fail to provide access to the services. They are "high tech, but not high touch." *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- It seems as though the language in the WIA is structured to prevent One-Stops from keeping excess revenue. It is unproductive to ban non-profit One-Stops from utilizing extra revenue. Change the language to allow both for-profits and non-profits to keep excess revenue up to a specified pre-negotiated limit with the Local WIB. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- One-Stop Centers should be the main provider of training. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Counselors make referrals to One-Stop Centers, where individuals are then referred back to vocational rehabilitation. Some front-line staff are not demonstrating the skills taught during training. It is important to improve the training for staff at One-Stop Centers, and to instruct staff on how to work with persons with disabilities. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- Persons with disabilities have concerns within the workforce development system that need to be addressed. The policy from the national level is good, but front-line staff do not implement the policy as they should. Access to transportation and childcare services is difficult. Functionally illiterate customers have additional concerns. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

V. Unemployment Insurance/Employment Service Reform and the One-Stop System

No comments were made specifically on this topic.

VI. Improved Opportunities for Training

- It is important to meet the needs of employers in the long-term if the program is to be successful. Partners need to be more proactive in designing time-sensitive programs. The current approach does not meet the needs of today's employers and job seekers. The English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) approach is difficult to practice in a time-limited environment. This makes servicing the Spanish population a challenge. *State Government Agency Representative*
- Require states or local workforce delivery areas to set aside a certain percentage of their funds for hard-to-serve population. Then allow the WIB to put out class-size contracts to serve these customers. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- Neither the Work-First nor Training-First philosophy, when applied alone, can get people out of the system. Individuals require a combination of both approaches in order to improve their skills and increase their wages enough to get out of poverty. Workforce system clients need to be provided with the tools to find, keep and get a better job. *Non-Profit Organization Representative*
- Eliminate the sequence of services currently in place and instead focus on providing core-intensive training services. Revise the eligible training provider system. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- Mandate financial participation in support of the local workforce system. Streamline and coordinate eligibility requirements for services to provide easier access. Recognize the customer's need to access technology and provide the necessary resources to make this possible. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- It is important to address the fact that New Orleans suffers from a 39% illiteracy rate. To be hired, an individual must be able to read and write. Businesses demand the best and the brightest. The underemployed need to be found and brought into the workforce. *Local Workforce Investment Board Member*

Eligibility Requirements

- More encouragement from WIA is needed for the system to improve the tracking of hard-to-serve clients, especially Out-of-School Youth. In practice, non-custodial fathers are not screened as parents. As a result, they are not made aware of their eligibility for

services. Some other hard-to-serve clients may not be served for things like substance abuse. *Non-Profit Organization Representative*

- WIA has created a confusing line of services that customers must jump through hoops to obtain. For instance, over 50 percent of young fathers are already working, but want to use the services of the One-Stop to train for and find a better job. *Non-Profit Organization Representative*

Required Work Hours

- Almost every state is experiencing deficit spending with TANF dollars. Texas spends about \$200 million a year above its annual grant of \$600 million. Texas is already exceeding the minimum 24 hours of the proposed 40-hour workweek that must be actual work (as opposed to training) proposed by the administration. The flexibility for the remaining 16 hours gives the system ample opportunity to work on individual plans to suit the needs of the family. It appears as though the employer community is able to absorb the increased number of required work hours. *State Government Agency Representative*
- The most vulnerable populations are those in the WIA adult programs and those now in TANF programs that are becoming mandated work programs. There are counterproductive policies in place that do not make sense with regards to what steps a customer must take to be employed and be a good employee. For example, there is a critical shortage of nurses and teachers. However, the cap on training hours and the high level of required work hours is counterproductive to have individuals trained to fill those positions. Customers lose their benefits if they choose to stay in training. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- It is better in the long run if people are allowed to complete a training program in order to find a better job. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- HR4090 severely restricts TANF recipients from obtaining training activities such as ESL training by limiting the amount of training that counts as work. The time limits for training within TANF need to be congruent with that of WIA. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

Tracking Requirements

- The Board cannot advocate strongly enough for changes that encourage training providers to provide services. Many providers are opting out because of undue administrative requirements. DOL should examine how they might reduce the reporting burdens. One suggestion is to limit WIA tracking requirements to WIA participants rather than requiring that all attendees be tracked. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*

Community-Based Organizations

- Training options and funding should be expanded under WIA, particularly in an effort to incorporate additional community-based organizations (CBOs). CBOs successfully meet the needs of the hard-to-serve population, but are not always available. A high level of customer choice has not been achieved, particularly as many CBOs do not participate as a result of the demanding reporting process. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- Differentiate private non-profit CBOs from public entities such as state and local governments. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- Grandfather CBOs who have been subcontractors in good standing under JTPA and/or licensed by their respective states to conduct training. These CBOs should be eligible to receive referrals after submitting their curriculum package. Subsequent certification should be based on performance measures. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- Require proportional set-aside allocations for competitive-bidding among community-based organizations. Or create risk-management centers in areas with significant caseloads of sanctioned clients. Put these centers up for competitive bidding by qualified CBOs. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*

Adult

- More opportunities to learn must be encouraged. On-the-job and customized training should be a priority of WIA Reauthorization to help the system train people to meet the needs of employers. This kind of training connects with work that pays; the programs should be promoted to employers. *Non-Profit Organization Representative*
- The system should consider how to use on-the-job and incumbent worker training to address literacy. It is a good place to address the problem of functionally illiterate workers. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

Youth

- Bring back free-lunch as part of eligibility criteria for youth to participate in youth programs. Enrollment criteria are not the same as outcome criteria. Youth should be enrolled as either an in or Out-of-School Youth, but regulations require that outcomes be measured differentiating older and younger youth. This needs to be fixed. GED programs serve older youth, yet the measures are the same as those for adults and dislocated workers. They should be measured as some of the youth with basic skills' goals. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*

- The effects of high skill testing on youth should be considered. While the tests meet accountability requirements, many youth are suffering from high skills testing. If the system keeps experiencing large numbers of failures on tests, we will see an increase in dropout rates. Further, if funding for Out-of-School Youth is cut, we should begin developing a penal system. What needs to happen is that Local Areas should be allowed the flexibility to set targets based on local labor markets and local needs. *Representative of Chief Elected Official*
- Strongly look at the definitions for older youth and drop-outs. Address that issue and allow the schools and WIA to work together. *State Workforce Investment Board Staff*

VII. Other Comments

Performance Measures

- Performance measurements miss the mark. Using Unemployment Insurance to obtain the data means that the information is often months out of date, and new hires are not in the system. State-wide data should not be used as criteria for local areas. *National Community-Based Organization Representative*
- We need to create a system of performance indicators and measures that cut across all workforce programs. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*
- The system needs a straightforward report card that covers all elements of the system. TANF's performance indicators focus on process rather than outcomes. This should be the other way around. *State Workforce Investment Board Member*
- It would be more productive to use system resources to case manage those individuals with the most needs than to spend resources on tracking and measuring. The system is focusing on the wrong things with customers because of the measuring requirements in place. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- It does not make sense to businesses for them to be involved in the measuring process, rather than outcomes, like they do for the TANF related programs. The process participation rating system is out of date. *Representative of One-Stop Partner Organization*
- Provide incentives for constant improvement within the local workforce system. *Local Workforce Investment Board Staff*

Welfare-to-Work

- There does not seem to be funds for regulated Welfare-to-Work or similar programs. WIA should set aside more funds for these programs as well as to improve services for

the hard-to-serve. There should be a greater focus on Welfare-to-Work efforts, and non-custodial parent programs should be developed. It would be unfortunate for the programs that use innovative strategies to lose funding. Custodial parents see the advantage of non-custodial parents working and tend to be more willing to allow them to see their children. *State Government Agency Representative*